Mending a Tattered Faith: How to Read Poetry Devotionally
Collegeville Institute Lectures
November 19, 2014

Carla Durand:
We'd like to welcome everybody to this luncheon and this time of conversation. Thank you for making the time to come. Just a few notes about how this event will work. We've gathered here. We're going to start with lunch, so once we're through these logistical sorts of things and our introduction of our speaker, we'll go through the line. And we'll start on that end. And then once you've picked up your lunch, you can find a spot at any one of the tables. And we hope that this is a time of conversation and fellowship and sharing with whoever is at your table. At about 12:15 or so, we'll draw people back here to the seats, and Susan will begin the more formal part of our presentation. So I think, in thinking about all that, we'll introduce Susan now, so that when we shift from lunch to the presentation, you already know a bit about who she is. And if 12:15 comes and people are still eating, particularly your desserts, you can bring your dessert with you, your cup of coffee, your glass of water, whatever you would like to this portion, too.

So, a few words about Susan VanZanten. Susan is currently a resident scholar at the Collegeville Institute, and she will be with us through the end of this semester. Susan received her BA from Westmont College and both her MA and her PhD from Emory University. She is currently a professor of English at Seattle Pacific University, and prior to her position in Seattle, Susan taught at Calvin College, Baylor University, and Covenant College. She is the founder of the SPU Center for Scholarship and Faculty Development and directed the center for 8 years. She speaks frequently to both academic and general audiences and regularly leads faculty workshops and retreats across the country. Although Susan's graduate training was in nineteenth-century American literature, she also has done extensive research and writing in South African literature, faculty development and pedagogy, and Christian higher education. The author or editor of eight books, she has also published many essays and reviews in academic journals and popular periodicals. Her academic memoir and her most recent book, *Reading a Different Story: a Christian Scholar's Journey from America to Africa*, recounts how her research and teaching has shifted from American to African history, leading her to advocate for a global approach to education and scholarship. It also recounts her journey of reorientation and reflects on the challenges of being a Christian woman scholar.

So, we're delighted to have Susan with us on campus, and we're delighted to have her with us this afternoon. And we'll meet her shortly after lunch. But again, we hope that this luncheon time is a time for you to meet some other folks on campus and to have an enjoyable conversation. So with that, we'll go through the line. And why don't we start with Janelle and Ward in the back, you can lead the way. And find a spot at the table, and then we'll come back at about 12:15.

Well, please join me in welcoming to the podium Susan VanZanten. ***audience applause***

Susan VanZanten:
Thank you, Carla. And thanks to the Collegeville Institute for inviting me to do this. And especially thanks to the Collegeville Institute for letting me come and have these wonderful four months here on

sabbatical reading, writing, walking, having great fellowship with the rest of the community. I've enjoyed it tremendously, and I'm in mourning, or denial, that I only have about a month to go.

I'm going to start today with a sort of brief history—very brief—about the fact that Christians have been reading poetry devotionally since the beginning of the of the church, of course, in the form of the Psalms, which were read, sung, and prayed both in Jewish communities and the early Christian communities. Then we have practices, like, of course, Benedict's Lectio Divina and the Divine Office, promoted devotional reading of the Scriptures, with the Divine Office focusing on the *poetry*. Notice my emphasis on the *poetry* of the Psalms, particularly. As a part of the Reformation's emphasis on having worship in vernacular tongues, a lot of Psalms were then translated into vernacular language, and also metrical form, so that they could be sung by congregations. Versus the previous monastic chanting of the Psalms or intoning of the Psalms. So, the Psalms started being transformed more into poetry in vernacular languages. In my own Reformed tradition, Psalm singing has long been an identifying characteristic, and as I was growing up, every Sunday we sang a Psalm. It was a regular part of the service. So, I have sung all of the Psalms repeatedly in my life. And with the spread of Biblical translation, the Psalms comprised, in Renaissance English culture, the most widely known poetic text. Hundreds of poets during this period began taking the Psalms and adapting them, paraphrasing them, turning them into forms of poetry. Creating new forms of devotional poetry that blurred the line between original poetry and translation. And there's hundreds of examples of this in the Renaissance, and one of the best-known, and one of my favorites, is Mary Sidney, who wrote a number of amazing versions of the Psalms from a woman's point of view in the Renaissance.

By the post-Reformation era, the devotional—I forgot that bullet point, there. Adapted into Psalms. By post-Reformation era, the devotional lyric, in particular, had emerged as a major English genre. In the devotional lyric, a lyric voice which speaks in terms of an "I," goes through a process of working through a set of spiritual concerns. So, spiritual poetry. Scriptural poetry, for example, the Psalms turned into poems, and then the devotional lyric—I'll say a little bit more about that in a minute—are excellent candidates for reading poetry devotionally. But I think that there's a lot of different poetic genres that are capable of providing spiritual growth, and that are good candidates for devotions. So, I moved beyond just the adaptations of the Psalms or devotional lyrics, into kind of a broader category that I'm going to call devotional poems. And devotional poems are poems which I'm going to define as helping us to grow in love of God and neighbor.

So, I'm going to describe one practice of reading devotionally. There's other practices as well. And the practice I'm going to describe draws on the tradition of Ignatian meditation. But it also draws on some of the inherent qualities of poetry. Because I believe that poetry is especially suited for spiritual exploration in many ways. You'll probably notice some overlap with what I'm saying, with some practices of Lectio Divina. But reading poetry is—I'm talking about it as a slightly different kind of practice, I think. And one of the things I'm exploring while I'm here is, how is it different, how is it similar from the practice of Lectio Divina. So, reading poetry devotionally, as I'm talking about, I think, is more attentive to the formal qualities of the text. And more analytical, perhaps, than Lectio Divina traditionally is. So.

Well, there's been numerous devotional practices employed since the days of the early church fathers and mothers. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, first published in 1548, outlined a particularly rich imaginative method of religious meditation. In this process, thought is directed carefully to facilitate the production of emotions. So, in other words, cognitive processes are used to produce affective results. And this is, of course, the same theory behind cognitive behavioral therapy that we use today. That if you practice certain ways of thinking, that will affect how you feel. When we meditate, we think on heavenly things. The 17th century writer, Joseph Hall, describes that meditation begins in the brain and then descends to the heart. It begins on earth and then ascends to heaven.

Ignatian meditation traditionally follows three steps: composition of place, understanding, and colloquy. Each of these three stages, respectively, corresponds to one of St. Augustine's three powers of the mind: memory, analysis, and will. The composition of place—and I imagine I'm preaching to the choir here; many of you probably are very familiar with Ignatian meditation. Lots of my audiences are not as familiar with this—but in the composition of place, we have an imaginative reconstruction that draws on memory of a physical place or scene. So, if one were to meditate on the Sermon on the Mount, for example, one might imagine the sights and the sounds of the spot. The hot, dry air, the smells arising from an unwashed group of people, the clear but gentle voice of Jesus. And as we imagine this, we draw on memories of similar experiences that we have had, which is why we can imaginatively reconceive it. The imaginative composition is then subjected to the process of the intellect or the understanding, as one thinks, or compares and contrasts, or analyzes, or does a number of intellectual kind of processes with this imaginative scene that has been recreated. Finally, the meditation concludes with a colloquy: an address either to God in the form of a prayer or to the self in form of an admonition or a resolution—I'm going to do this, or I'm going to live this way, or I'm going to try to, this afternoon, do this thing. So, the movement is from imagination to thought to application.

In his landmark study, a book called *The Poetry of Meditation*, Louis Martz traces how this process of meditation operated as a fundamental organizing impulse in the British poetry of the 17th century. Martz shows us some of the best-known devotional lyrics in the English language, lyrics such as John Donne's “Better my Heart, Three-Person'd God,” or George Herbert's “The Collar,” are formally constructed as meditations. That is, the beginning of the poem starts with a description of a scene, the middle of the poem works through thought and analysis, and the end of the poem ends in a kind of colloquy or prayer or address to God or resolution. So the poem itself—and that's the tradition of the devotional lyric, that it's—the poem itself is structured in that way.

A perhaps less well-known devotional poet, but equally as brilliant, I think is, the late 17th century American Puritan minister Edward Taylor, who wrote poetry as a devotional practice. Now this, you may think, is not the most typical Puritan practice, but it was one that faithfully and creatively drew on his theological tradition. Meditation was a key aspect of Puritan life. Especially before taking the Lord's Supper, which, the Westminster Shorter Catechism admonished, should not be taken unless you had gone through a process of meditation. The Puritan minister Thomas Hooker said about meditation, “It's an exercise for two ends: the first, to make inquiry of the truth; and the second, to make the heart affected therewith.” Now, as a Puritan Minister, Taylor administered the sacrament of communion once a month in a small frontier village church. And in order to prepare himself to do this, he took the Biblical text on which he would be preaching that Sunday, and he composed a poem, a meditative poem, before

he wrote his sermon. And this was the process of meditation he went through before writing a sermon, a more kind of reason-based, argumentative, analytical, public document. His poems, called preparatory meditations, were only for himself and God. No one else read these poems during his time. They were not made public until in 1937, some enterprising scholar discovered a leather manuscript book in the Yale University Library. And his poems were made public at that point. So today, readers can follow his meditative moves as they read his extraordinary poetry. So if you look at your handout… Just curious, how many of you have read Taylor before? Only one, okay. ***audience laughter*** On your handout, the first poem is one of Taylor's meditations. And he's going to be preaching, that Sunday, on the text, "I am the living bread." That's his text. And here's his meditation on the text. And I will say that I changed the spelling to make it easier for you to read.

> When that this Bird of Paradise put in
> This Wicker Cage (my corpse) to tweedle praise
> Had pecked the fruit forbad: and so did fling
> Away its Food; and lost its golden days;
> It fell into Celestial Famine sore:
> And never could attain a morsel more.
>
> Alas! alas! Poor Bird, what wilt thou do?
> The Creatures field no food for Souls e're gave.
> And if thou knock at Angels' doors they show
> An empty barrel: they no soul bread have.
> Alas! Poor Bird, the World's White Loaf is done
> And cannot yield thee here a smallest Crumb.
>
> In this sad state, God's Tender Bowels run
> Out streams of Grace: And he to end all strife
> The Purest Wheat in Heaven, his dear-dear Son
> Grinds, and kneads up into this Bread of Life.
> Which Bread of Life from Heaven down came and stands
> Dished on thy Table by Angels' Hands.
>
> Did God mold up this bread in heaven, and bake,
> Which from his Table came, and to thine goeth?
> Doth he bespeak thee thus, This Soul Bread take.
> Come Eat thy fill of this thy God's White Loaf?
> It's Food too fine for Angels, yet come, take
> And eat thy fill. It's Heaven's Sugar Cake.

Now, can you imagine the difference between this poem and Taylor's rather Puritan sermon on the poem? Both provide opportunities for spiritual growth and formation, but this poem works in a completely different way. George Herbert once wrote, "a verse may find him, who a sermon flies, and turn delight into a sacrifice." Poetry employs imagination and language in aesthetically pleasing ways.

There's the delight. The imagination produces images, which need not be only visual. Poetic imagery can evoke any of the five senses. By the end of the poem, I hope you were imagining tasting the angel cake.

Certain linguistic techniques create especially powerful and emotionally moving images. Techniques like simile and metaphor, onomatopoeia, metonymy, personification, all those things you learned back in your English class a long time ago. Now, we employ this kind of figurative language in all kinds of situations. Just listen to the sportscasters as they're speaking on Saturday during the game, and you'll hear lots of metaphors, similes, personifications, etc. We use that in this kind of language all the time. But poets use this language in a pervasive way, and they use it in such a way that it's highly compact and compressed and elaborate. We must read slowly and carefully and repeatedly to unpack these riches. Poetry demands a lot of us, but it offers profound rewards. Now, many poems also rely on sound. Rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance. The sound helps to create the meaning, and the sound also evokes the emotions. Poetry read out loud is a physical practice. It involves the breath, the tongue, the mouth, the vocal cords. We take poetry in both with our eyes and our ears. We feel it. Formal poetic elements create new dimensions of both emotional and intellectual meaning. So, I think it's important to consider those particular elements of poetry and to experience the formal qualities of poetry in our devotional practice of reading poems.

Just, very quickly, some formal aspects, and then we'll look at some poems, because I know that's probably more interesting than me talking. So, some questions to ask when you read a poem. Who's speaking? Is it the devotional "I," or is there someone else speaking? Who's speaking? Is the poem addressing someone? What kind of situation is the poem taking place in? Is it describing a scene, an emotion, a narrative, an experience? Notice that the Taylor poem went through this whole narrative. You know, the bird ate the wrong fruit, and then it was hungry, and they couldn't find any food for it, so then God served as a baker, and then the bread came down. It was a little narrative it went through. So, those kinds of questions about the poem. Secondly, the sounds of the poem. You always read a poem out loud, repeatedly. Listen to its sounds and its rhythms. The words of the poem. Words have specific meanings but also evocative meanings. Denotative and connotative meanings, right? Words can provoke, evoke, stimulate certain kinds of feelings. And poets choose one word rather than another word because of the kind of emotional connotations that are with the words. So, the particular words. What would be changed if we took out one word and put another word in? Kind of the question you can ask. Imagery and metaphors. Of course, very important. The striking metaphors—a lot of poems use a lot of striking metaphors, and that's one of the things that Edward Taylor is known for, is his incredibly striking metaphors, the whole metaphoric construction of the poem that we read. Not every but not every poet uses a lot of metaphors. We'll look at a poem shortly it doesn't have very many metaphors in it at all. But, what metaphors deepen it's meaning? And then also allusions. Are there any aspects of the poem that refer to something else? Something from another text, something from history, something from the Bible? And what meaning does that kind of allusion add to the poem?

So, just to summarize, before we look at some poems. One way to read poetry devotionally is to start by identifying and imagining the scene. You might call it the composition of place, the context. And then employing our understanding: historical, Biblical—particularly, I'm going to focus on poetic understanding. And then thirdly, making a resolution or application to ourselves in a colloquy.

One wonderful resource for reading poetry devotionally is the book *Drawn to the Light: Poems on Rembrandt's Religious Paintings* by Marilyn Chandler MacEntyre, who was here just a month or two ago, reading her poetry. And at the end of the handout, there's other a couple of other suggestions. But I really like this book for reading poetry devotionally. The book pairs full-color reproductions of paintings by Rembrandt, religious paintings by Rembrandt, with poems by McEntyre. The concrete, physical details of color, line, shape, form, texture, composition in the painting help to shape our composition of place. So our composition of place, both the poem and the painting work together, kind of adding extra dimensions to that. And the poem definitely calls our attention to those elements. So here is Rembrandt's and McIntyre's "The Return of the Prodigal Son." This is on the second page of your handout. As I read this, you might notice it doesn't have a lot of what you might consider traditional poetic qualities. It doesn't rhyme. It has very few metaphors. The poetic structure that works most predominantly in this poem is the use of whether a line stops or whether a line is a run-on line, if it keeps going. But think initially about composition of place. That's not the best— you can see that poem? You're probably all familiar with that painting, I hope.

> We would expect a close-up:
> 'Father and son reconciled.'
> We would emphasize the intimacy
> we've learned to invade:
> the father's painful, joyful gaze,
> the hand that draws his boy close
> to the very heart he broke,
> the young man's shame
> in the shadow of a half-turned face.

The first stanza calls our attention to the foreground of the painting, what's most apparent. To the expression on the father's face, emphasized by the golden glow, outlined by the beard, of course. The predominance of the hands—see the two hands pointing right into the center? And the darkness of the prodigal half-obscured face. All of those elements in the painting, the poem emphasizes. That's what we would expect to see. But there's more to the painting and the story, and the poem goes on to unfold that.

"The dark onlookers—" And here, that onlookers are extremely dark. You probably can't even see the third one, there right? There's this one, and this one, and there's one back in there, if you can see it.

> The dark onlookers seem
> almost a mistake: they mar
> the tenderness of what would play
> so much better on the empty stage.
>
> How jarring to be reminded
> how little that is human is private.
> There are witnesses and judgments,
> costs and consequences.

The painter insists on this awkward point:
the father's forgiveness is not the whole story.
The spotlight that illumines the two of them,
their embrace the very form of forgiveness,
doesn't quite obscure the ones who stand and watch,
not quite so willing to receive the wretched sinner home.

They're in the dark, but they're back there, they're faint.

They have accounts to settle, doubt about
a change that seems a little too dramatic.
They are men of common sense.
Their judgments are just and cautious —
all things considered, quite properly skeptical.

The young man will wear his past, a hair shirt,
under festal garments. He will bear his brother's
reasonable resentment and endure recrimination
from those who make him a measure of their virtue,
shielded in his shame by his father's blessing,
girded with love for the hard labor to come.

Notice how the father is almost shielding him from the three in the back, as well. From the shame. Now, McEntyre uses poetic elements here very sparingly, with great precision and detail. There's a lot of resonant alliteration in the poem. "Reasonable resentment" and "recrimination." Very effective line. Earlier, "costs" and "consequences." Hard words. Effective line breaks. That "hair shirt,/under festal garments," I think, is a particularly effective line break. And then, perhaps the image pattern of the girdle of love, but it's girding. Maybe there's a girdle of love. Very, very, very subtle. But all this further advances the composition of place, and I think, the emotional heft of our meditation on the ideas in this poem.

In *Mending a Tattered Faith: Devotions with Emily Dickinson*, I attempt to help readers encounter Emily Dickinson's poetry in this kind of devotional manner. This book reprints twenty-nine poems by Emily Dickinson, and each has a question for the reader to ponder, followed by a brief reflection that tries to go through this process that I've just gone through. And we'll look at, well, at least one. We'll see if we have time for two poems. Looking at the poems' images, ideas, its composition of place, and looking at the poetic strategies that the poem employs to create certain effects. So, again on your handout, Dickinson's poem "978." One of my favorites—well, I say that almost with every Dickinson poem. My students keep saying, all the Dickinson poems are your favorites! But.

Faith — is the Pierless Bridge
Supporting what We see
Unto the Scene that We do not —

Too slender for the eye

It bears the Soul as bold
As it were rocked in Steel
With Arms of Steel at either side —
It joins — behind the Veil

To what, could We presume
The Bridge you would cease to be
To Our far, vacillating Feet
A first Necessity.

Now, this is a much more difficult poem than Marilyn's poem, right? But I also think it rewards us in perhaps deeper ways, as well. Think about the composition of place. Think about what you see from this poem. What's the first image that comes to you? Let's start with a picture.

Audience Member:
inaudible

Susan VanZanten:
What? Bridge, right? It's a picture of a bridge, yeah? And the poem starts by giving us this incredible metaphor, just right off. Straightforward, you know. Right from the beginning, we know this is a poem about a metaphor, and we have “faith — is a bridge.” And then the rest of the poem describes the bridge. Okay? This is not a devotional lyric, it's not an “I” voice speaking. This is a voice of, kind of, you know, almost dictionary quality. “Here's the word, I'm going to define it for us. I going to define what faith is.” What kind of bridge is described, here? Any… what characteristics you see in this bridge? If you're envisioning it—I mean, there's lots of different bridges, right? What kind of bridge is this bridge? Anything unusual about it?

Audience Member:
It has no piers?

Susan VanZanten:
It has no piers! What does that mean?

Audience Member:
It’s just floating, it’s…

Susan VanZanten:
It's just floating, it has no support. Right? Okay, most bridges—there's the piers. See the piers in the bridge? Okay, this bridge doesn't have piers. It is pier-less. What else can we say about the bridge in the poem?

Audience Member:

inaudible Very long…

Susan VanZanten:
Okay, it's very long…

Audience Member:
…disappearing in the distance.

Susan VanZanten:
Exactly! It's very long, it's disappearing in the distance. And to, you know, unpacking the metaphor, one side of the bridge is what we can see, and the other side of the bridge is what we can't see. Somewhere, you know, so it's very long, it's off, it's in the distance, we don't know what's there. Okay? What else about the bridge?

Audience Member:
It's very skinny.

Susan VanZanten:
It's very skinny! "Too slender for the eye." It's so skinny that, what?

Audience member:
inaudible

Susan VanZanten:
You can't even see it, it's invisible! Okay? Now, we're getting a really weird bridge here, right? No supports, really long, from what we can see to what we can't see, so skinny that you can hardly see it. What else?

Audience Member:
It's strong.

Susan VanZanten:
It's strong, yes! How is the strength emphasized?

Several voices from the audience:
Arms of steel.

Susan VanZanten:
Arms of steel! Okay? It might be long, it might be mysterious, it might be difficult to see, it doesn't seem to have any supports, and yet it's very strong and secure. "Arms of Steel." I think that this poem is describing a suspension bridge. A suspension bridge could be described as being "Pierless." It doesn't have piers. It's suspended from cables moored in the ground at either side, rather than having—either Roman arches or piers are traditionally what holds a bridge together. This is a picture of the first American extension bridge, which was built in 1855. And it was built over Niagara. Niagara. And it was

the forerunner of its more famous cousin, the Brooklyn Bridge, which was built later. Emily Dickinson knew about the Niagara suspension bridge, and it was a huge phenomenon in her time. Everyone went, “How can you you build a bridge which didn't have any supports?” Now, the two “Arms of Steel” are the cords, the big cords, the suspension cords that are holding the bridge in, that you're surrounded by as you walk through. I thought, what an incredible composition of place that she's doing. And with this metaphor of this, she's conveying some things about faith.

Dickinson loved puns. And we find one right away in the first line of the poem. “The Pierless Bridge.” I've suggested “the Pierless Bridge” is a suspension bridge, but the pun on “Pierless” might also suggest that it is without peer. Incomparable, without equal, precious, amazing. As a suspension bridge, faith stretches between what we can see on one end, and what we can't see on the other. Which is described with another great pun: “the Scene that We do not,” S-C-E-N-E, and S-E-E-N, what we can't see. Anybody getting any allusions here? Reference to another text?

Audience member:
Faith is the substance of things hoped for?

Susan VanZanten:
Yep. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11. Another definition of faith. Very faint! Very faint allusion, but enriches the poem when you start thinking about that. The sentence begun in the fourth line, notice, runs without a dash or a mark of punctuation into the second stanza to present this paradox of this slight bridge that's nonetheless as strong as steel, bearing the soul boldly and confidently. The bridge is almost personified. Almost like an attentive mother. The arms of steel carry the soul, and they rock it gently for comfort. And if you've ever crossed a foot suspension bridge, you know it does kind of rock a little, gently. Think about that feeling in your body as you're crossing there.

In line eight, we return to the scene that we cannot see, which is the other side of the bridge, where the stiffening tresses will tie the deck superstructure to the walls of the gorge. And what, visually, is here, in the poem? What does the poem describe as being on this other side?

Audience Member:
inaudible

Susan VanZanten:
VanZanten laughs Say more. Okay, so there's a veil. Right? What does that mean, that there's a veil?

Audience Member:
inaudible

Susan VanZanten:
VanZanten laughs I don't think it's Vail, Colorado on the other side of the bridge, no.

Audience member:

inaudible …is there such a thing as… ***inaudible*** …veil… ***inaudible***

Susan VanZanten:
Well, let's just start with the idea of, we've got the suspension bridge, we have it crossing, you got—just, the real concrete. What would the veil be? What? On the other side. Can we see the other side?

Audience Member:
No.

Susan VanZanten:
No. Why not? Why might you not be able to see the other side of the bridge?

Audience Member:
Fog.

Susan VanZanten:
Fog. That's the Golden Gate, which frequent you can't see the other side of, because of the fog. Right? It's a veil of fog. You know the, what is it, the Bridal Veil Falls in Oregon? There's so much water falling down, there's a veil of fog. So we use that. But you're right, and there's more to the veil than that. What veil do we have to go through to get to the other side of the bridge of faith? Death.

Audience Member:
The veil of tears.

Susan VanZanten:
Yeah, the veil of tears, the veil being ripped in the temple to allow us into, going beyond the veil in the nineteenth century meant to die. And that's why there were all those mediums in the nineteenth century trying to reach beyond the veil. So the veil becomes loaded with lots of, kind of, meaning, there. The temple veil was torn in two at the time of Christ's death. The book of Hebrews associates our hope of salvation with images of anchoring, strength, and veil. I'm going to read another passage from Hebrews: “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” This invisible bridge of faith mysteriously floats above the rapids. It carries us to a place that we haven't seen yet. But it will carry us securely. Now, thinking about faith in that way, feeling faith in that way, for me opens it up in a new manner. Which is what I think a devotional poem should do for us.

I'll leave you to ponder or talk with a friend about how thinking about faith as a bridge might affect your heart. But we have a few more minutes to look at one last poem. One thing I want to say before looking at this last poem is that you'll notice, you know, if the Ignatian—being a pre-modern person, Ignatius thought you could pretty easily divide these things. But I've got an arrow going both that way and that way, there. I mean, did you notice as we're talking about these poems, we move from the imagination to analysis and then from analysis back to the imagination. And analysis helps our imaginations grow,

and our imaginations tell us what to look at in doing the analysis. So, it's not a clear division, but I think both parts of that are very important.

So, another Dickinson poem. Very short one.

> Jesus! thy Crucifix
> Enable thee to guess
> The smaller size!
>
> Jesus! thy second face
> Mind thee in Paradise
> Of ours!

Context, voice, what's happening in the poem? Just, very simply, at the outset. What do you notice? What's the scene? We're going to create a little scene out of this poem. What would it be?

Audience Member:
Jesus on the cross?

Susan VanZanten:
Jesus on the cross? And…

Audience Member:
The thief that… ***inaudible*** "On this day ***inaudible*** in Paradise?"

Susan VanZanten:
Okay… That thief, Jesus on the cross, the thief saying that, do you see the thief saying that? Is the thief speaking the poem? Who's speaking the poem? Who's the voice? The poem is being addressed to Jesus, so we might call it a prayer. Prayer poem, right? It's being addressed to Jesus. Jesus is being addressed rather vehemently. Twice. "Jesus!" Exclamation point. Exclamation point. So, someone is saying something to Jesus.

Now, usually when people wear a crucifix, why do they wear a crucifix? I mean, notice the word "crucifix." The crucifix refers to, right, the emblem of it. Whether on the wall or a necklace or whatever. Now, normally why do people wear a crucifix, or why is there a crucifix…there isn't one in here, is there? Unusual.

Audience Member:
To show that they're a Christian.

Susan VanZanten:
Okay, to show that they're a Christian? To remind them of Christ's sacrifice? Right? And what's the voice asking Jesus to do?

Audience Member:
Remember her.

Susan VanZanten:
Remember her! It's completely reversing what we usually do with the crucifix, right? Right. Jesus, look at the crucifix and remember me! The smaller size. The smaller size. “The smaller size” refers to what?

Audience Member:
The sinner.

Susan VanZanten:
The sinner. Her own crucifix that she has born? We’ll say “she,” just because Dickinson wrote it. Doesn't mean this is Dickinson speaking, I always want to caution people about that. But, the speaker of the poem says to Jesus, “Jesus, your crucifix enables you, allows you to guess the smaller size. Allows you to know what my small—my crucifix is smaller, obviously, than yours—but allows you to know what pain feels like for me. The suffering that I feel.” Second address to Jesus: “Jesus! thy second face/Mind.” We might think of that as a “re-mind,” right? You know, “Mind thee,” reminds thee in paradise, when Jesus is in paradise, his second face will remind him of ours. Of our what? Our face. Now, what does it mean that Jesus has a second face? It sounds like a cubist painting or something. Two faces. What's…

Audience Member:
The resurrected…

Susan VanZanten:
The resurrected face? Why would Jesus’ resurrected face remind him of us?

Audience Member:
Because we were created in God’s image.

Susan VanZanten:
Okay, and Jesus…? In what way does Jesus have two faces? He has his resurrected face, and he has what before that?

Audience Member:
inaudible …divinity.

Susan VanZanten:
Human and divine face. His resurrected face might be his— I don't know. His resurrected face is still his human face. It's just a transformed human face. Right? But the idea that Jesus is both divine and human, and which part of Jesus’ faces will remind him of us? The fact that he had a human face will remind him of us, as well.

Notice, this isn't an “I” poem. It's an “ours.” Again, it's a communal kind of statement. This is what we as a body affirm. Each of the three lines opens by calling on Jesus urgently. And it tells Jesus two things.

First, he's reminded that the depths of his suffering make it possible for him to know, give him the experience on which to ascertain our smaller pain. Dickinson uses the diminutive here, you know, “The smaller size.” She always likes to make things small, so her cross, or our cross is a smaller size. And then we also, as you picked up right away, there's an echo in here of the exchange between Jesus—an allusion—between Jesus and the thief on the cross. Who pleads, “Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom,” and Jesus’ reply “I tell you the truth today you will be with me in paradise.” And again, the voice of the poem is just reminding Jesus of that exchange. You see that? The crucifixion described in the first verse leads to the paradise in the second verse. And in both circumstances, Jesus is a “tender pioneer,” which is how Dickinson described him in another poem. Jesus is our tender pioneer. This is a poem I believe to—well, this is a poem that I pray often in times of suffering. Because it reminds me that Jesus, through his incarnation and death on the cross and resurrection, became one with me in my suffering, so that I could one day join him in paradise. Thank you. ***audience applause***